TL 7446

Seven East Timorese seek asylum in embassies

TAPOL, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign, today issued the following press release. All solidarity groups are requested to make immediate representations to the Swedish and Finnish governments, through the embassies in their country, for the seven men to be granted asylum.

EAST TIMORESE STUDENTS SEEK POLITICAL ASYLUM IN SWEDISH AND FINNISH EMBASSIES

Seven young East Timorese who have been on the run from the Indonesian army for nearly two years have today gone into the Swedish and Finnish embassies in Jakarta to ask for political asylum. They have all had terrifying experiences at the hands of the army of occupation, especially since the Santa Cruz massacre on 12 November 1991 when Indonesian troops shot dead more than 200 peaceful demonstrators.

All seven went into hiding in East Timor after the massacre and eventually left the country last year, since when they have been on the run in Jakarta. As fugitive aliens in over-crowded Jakarta, without documents or social support, they have lived a precarious existence, haunted by the threat of capture. Attempts to leave the country illegally have been unsuccessful.

In recent months, army military intelligence has stepped up its pursuit of East Timorese students studying in universities throughout Java. Fully-armed platoons are known to have surrounded student residences in Jakarta at night. The most recent incident took place on 18 May.

The three men now in the Swedish embassy are: Florencio Anunciacao Fernandes, 22, who participated in the 12 November 1991 demonstration and was forced to abandon his studies after being constantly pursued by the army; Porfirio da Costa Oliveira, 23, who was badly wounded during the massacre and was treated by Catholic nuns for several months before fleeing to Jakarta; and Jose Manuel de Oliveira Sousa, 24, also a demonstrator in November 1991, who escaped arrest four days later with his brother but they got separated and his brother has since disappeared.

The four in the Finnish embassy are: Mateus Brito Ximenes, 23, who fled the army although severely wounded during massacre and reached Jakarta last July; Clementino Faria, 27, who was hounded by the army after taking part in a demonstration in January 1990 when the UN ambassador visited Dili; Oscar Goncalves da Silva, 20, who escaped arrest after the 1991 demonstration; and Ventura Valentino de Conceicao, 23, who was detained and tortured after demonstrating during the Pope's visit to Dili in October 1989 and later took part in a pro-independence rally at his school in September 1990.

In statements to the Swedish and Finnish ambassadors, the fugitive students said:

We come to you as witnesses to the Indonesian military brutality which, since December 7, 1975, has become a fact of everyday life in East Timor, a military brutality which has consisted of torture, rape, intimidation, terror and slaughter of the kind the world witnessed on 12 November 1991 in Dili, a military brutality which has robbed us of the right to an education, has made us foreigners in our own country, and has now forced us to leave our beloved homeland and our families and friends.

It is clear that the Indonesian government will exert all possible pressure on the Swedish and Finnish governments to convince them to hand over the seven students. TAPOL has issued an appeal to both governments to resist this pressure and give them asylum in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Protocol on Refugees.

A number of West Papuan and Acehnese fugitives from Indonesian persecution have already been given asylum in Sweden.

The following is the statement given to the Finnish ambassador in Jakarta by Mateus Brito Ximenes, Clementino Faria, Oscar Goncalves da Silva and Ventura Valentino de Conceicao:

Joint statement and request for political asylum

Wednesday, June 23 1993

1. INTRODUCTION

Honoured and respected Ambassador and officials of this Embassy, we come to you in the name of the youth of East Timor who live under the Indonesian military occupation and constant threat to their lives and well-being. We request your protection in the sincere belief that the government of Finland holds in high regard the value and dignity of human life in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We come to you as witnesses to the Indonesian military brutality which, since December 7, 1975, has become a fact of everyday life in East Timor, a military brutality which has consisted of torture, rape, intimidation, terror and slaughter of the kind the world witnessed on 12 November 1991 in Dili, a military brutality which has robbed us of the right to an education, has made us foreigners in our own country, and has now forced us to leave our beloved homeland and our families and friends.

We are here today, therefore, not as youths seeking adventure or a free trip out of this country (as no doubt the Indonesian government will attempt to convince you of in the days to come) but as persecuted individuals who fear for our lives. We trust that the government of Finland will assist us in our bid for political asylum, in accordance with International Law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 14, Clause I of which states that "Every human being has the right to seek and be granted refuge in another country for the purpose of avoiding persecution." Article 15, Clause I of the same Declaration states that "Every person has the right to citizenship", and Clause II, "No human being may be arbitrarily denied citizenship of a country or be refused their right to alter their citizenship."

II. BACKGROUND

In order that you may be aware of the reality of our situation, we would like to inform you of the following facts:

In recent months we have been constantly pursued by members of the Indonesian intelligence acting under orders from the Special Operations Commander, Brigadier-General Theo Syafei, to arrest us and to prove to the world that we are among the fifty... reported missing (see attached article, Jakarta Post 3 April 1993) since the bloody incident on November 12 1991. Our names however are not included on either the lists of killed or missing, and this is purely and simply a tactic of the Indonesian government aimed at improving their image at the UN World Conference on Human Rights currently taking place in Vienna, Austria. Let us repeat that we are not among those documented as killed or missing after the Santa Cruz massacre but rather a small group of eye-witnesses to Indonesian military atrocities who managed to escape from East Timor from July 1992. We firmly believe that this latest strategy of the Indonesian government is yet a further attempt to dupe the international community in the interests of freeing themselves and ABRI [the Indonesian Armed Forces] of all blame for the deaths of our innocent East Timorese friends and relatives.

We are fully aware of the diplomatic repercussions which our request for political asylum will have for you and your government in relations with Indonesia; however, in the interests of Truth, Justice, the supremacy of International Law, we strongly appeal to you to give due consideration to our request and to act in a spirit of democracy and freedom to defend our rights as prescribed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, delivering the keynote speech at the opening of the Vienna Human Rights Conference, stated that "The international community ... must take over from those states that fail to fulfil their obligations (in terms of respect of human rights). Since it should be quite clear from our testimonies and those of independent international and non-governmental agencies over the past seventeen years that Indonesia has failed abysmally in the above respect, it is our fervent hope that your government may lead the way in putting this UN-endorsed principle into practice.

In the name of the peace-loving and martyred people of East Timor, we thank you for your kind attention.

Jakarta, 23 June 1993

Mateus Brito Ximenes

Clementino Faria

Oscar Goncalves da Silva

Ventura Valentino de Conceicao

A similar statement was handed to the Swedish ambassador by Florencio Anunciacao Fernandes, Profirio da Costa Oliveira, Jose Manuel de Oliveira Souza, with an additional sentence at the end of the third from last paragraph: We trust that we will be accorded the same rights to a life free of fear and persecution as were respected by your government in the case of Free Aceh Movement Leader, Tengku Hasan di Tiro.